

Executive Summary

Evaluation Study of the *Kit for New Parents*

INTRODUCTION

The First 5 California Children and Families Commission's *Kit for New Parents* is a new model for universal parenting education that serves parents and providers of the half-million children born each year in California. The *Kit* contains six educational videos, a *Parents Guide* with links to telephone and internet resources, and eight brochures, a baby book, and addresses prenatal care, early childhood development, nutrition, health, safety, and child care. Currently produced in English and Spanish—and shortly in Chinese, Vietnamese and Korean—the *Kit* is distributed to California's new parents and their providers through home visits, prenatal care, parenting classes, child care, WIC, hospitals, a toll-free telephone number, and other programs. The *Kit* program is intended to work synergistically with the First 5 media campaign and county parenting education and school readiness efforts.

The First 5 Commission funded the University of California, Berkeley, Center for Community Wellness to investigate the use and impact of the *Kit*. The primary goals of the evaluation were to examine the value of the *Kit* as a First 5 investment and to identify ways to improve this initiative.

METHODS

The mixed-method evaluation of the *Kit* included:

- 1) **A quantitative, quasi-experimental study** in which mothers were interviewed about key parenting issues. About half of the mothers were interviewed in Spanish, and half in English. A substantial proportion of mothers were from underserved populations that typically have less access to health care and parenting information.
 - In early Fall 2000, we recruited, interviewed, and gave *Kits* to 542 mothers. Six to nine weeks later, we re-interviewed 462 of these mothers. Subsequently, we recruited and interviewed 1236 non-*Kit* mothers, of which 1011 were re-interviewed 6-9 weeks later.
 - Fourteen months after their first interview, 350 of the *Kit* mothers were again re-contacted for a comprehensive survey of their parenting knowledge, attitudes and practices. A group of 414 non-*Kit* mothers completed a similar interview.
- 2) **Telephone interviews** were conducted with representatives of the 58 counties' First 5 Commissions to obtain feedback on key *Kit* distribution issues.
- 3) **A qualitative study** including interviews and focus groups with 23 administrators, 23 groups of providers, and 27 groups of parents in 10 counties throughout the state. More than 300 individuals participated in this study.

RESULTS

High percentages of mothers used the *Kit*.

- In the first six to nine weeks, 87% of mothers and 53% of their partners used the *Kit*.
- In the longer-term, over two thirds of the mothers and one-third of their partners had used the *Kit*, and one-half of the mothers shared the *Kit* with friends or family members.

Most mothers found the *Kit* helpful.

- By six to nine weeks, 94% of mothers who used the *Kit* reported finding it helpful. About one-half of mothers said the *Kit* had changed their thinking or behavior.
- At the 14-month follow-up, we specifically asked *Kit* mothers about safety, helping their baby learn, feeding their baby, breastfeeding, smoking, child health, and child care. Mothers reported finding the *Kit* helpful for an average of four out of these seven key parenting issues.
- Women who received the *Kit* during pregnancy and Spanish speakers found the *Kit* more helpful. The *Kit* was equally helpful for first-time and experienced mothers, and for teenage and older mothers.

Significant knowledge gains were associated with the *Kit*.

- At both follow-ups, mothers who received the *Kit* showed significantly greater knowledge gains than those who did not receive a *Kit* on eight key parenting questions addressing infant sleeping position, feeding, development; and finding health and child care resources for mothers and babies.
- When compared with other parenting education programs, the effect size of these knowledge gains was more than double the average effect size of other parenting education programs studied¹, and at a much lower cost.
- At the 14-month follow-up, *Kit* mothers also had significantly higher knowledge scores on a more comprehensive set of parenting questions.
- Women who received the *Kit* during pregnancy and Spanish speakers began the study with lower knowledge scores than other mothers who received the *Kit*, but showed greater knowledge gains at both the 6-9 week and 14-month follow-ups.

Positive attitudes and parenting practices were associated with the *Kit*.

- Mothers who received a *Kit* were significantly more likely to believe that picking up and comforting a crying three-month-old will not spoil the baby.
- Mothers who received a *Kit* were significantly more likely to:
 - Read aloud to their baby every day
 - Follow safe bottle practices, e.g., not propping the bottle for feedings
 - Have a consistent health care provider for their child
 - Have taken more steps to childproof their home

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Full reports and an executive summary of the *Kit* evaluation study are available for download at <http://www.ccfrc.ca.gov/kit.htm>. The evaluation found that the *Kit* is a successful and cost-effective investment to help parents promote their children's health, development and readiness for school. Parents, providers, and county commission staff recommended ways to improve the initiative by organizing *Kit* materials by the child's developmental stage, producing a DVD format of the videos, developing other language versions, and providing more training and training materials.

¹ Abt Associates meta-analysis of 108 parenting intervention studies (Layzer et al., 2001).